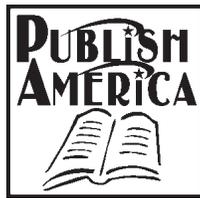


Netwatcher

BC Starkson



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This book is dedicated to Katina Starkson.
She is my love, my life, my wife.

Chapter 1

The Adventure Begins

It was 3:58 p.m., and Boyd Carson was ready to meet Kristal on the corner and go for a few brews at the local watering hole. He locked the door to Z720, and made sure everything was squared away in the computer training section. He headed for the north elevator and pushed the elevator button. He heard the elevator door open and say 7th floor going down, and as he got to the first floor, he stepped through the security door, walked about sixty feet, took a left at the ramp, and made his way to the northeast corner of 18th Street and 8th Avenue. He heard the familiar sound of the Red Rocket stopping. He got into the car and thought it was time to start a great weekend.

Kristal Carson stood on the 9th floor balcony and took in the view of south Birmingham. The views atop Red Mountain were always good, but today seemed especially beautiful for the first part of March. The sky was a gorgeous dark blue with a few white cottony clouds scattered on the horizon. The trees in south Birmingham were getting some of their green back from the winter months, and it was a nice contrast against the blue horizon. She absorbed a few more minutes of the scenery and went into the condo. She checked the kitchen clock, and it was time to pick Boyd up from work. She took the elevator to the bottom floor lobby and made her way to her parking space. The candy apple red Chrysler LeBaron Convertible still looked bitchin, and it was always a pleasure hopping in and firing up the Red Rocket. Since it was a gorgeous day, she decided to put the top down.

Kristal made her way up the ramp and waved to the security guard. She took a right on Beacon Parkway East and made her way to Valley. Kristal had

to stop a few blocks before Valley because two cars were stopped, and the passengers were sitting there having a discussion. Kristal sat there for awhile, and once her patience was gone, she honked the horn for them to move on. She could not see through the tinted glass of the car in front of her, but she could see the guy in the other car. He seemed to be Hispanic, and he yelled at Kristal to take it easy for awhile. He said he was conducting some business, and she would have to wait a few minutes. Kristal told him to kiss her butt, and she made a three point turn, took a left at Beacon Parkway West, and made her way to Valley. She was running late so she took a right on Valley, a right on Green Springs, and made her way to downtown Birmingham. As she went under the I65 overpass, she saw another red convertible coming from the opposite direction, and it looked pretty good, but it wasn't as good-looking as the Red Rocket. It was 4:10, and as she was taking a left on 18th Street, she didn't see Boyd at his usual corner. Where could he be?

Chapter 2

The Meeting

It was Tuesday, the day after the Martin Luther King holiday, and Boyd sat in his office on the 7th floor of the Department of Veteran Affairs Southeastern Blind Rehabilitation Center. He had to go to a meeting in about ten minutes, but before he left for the meeting, he had to check his inbox for an important message. If the message was there, Boyd and Kristal would be on their way to an international conference in October to present the findings of an evaluation he was conducting with some computer access technology for the Blind. Boyd sat down at his computer, held down the left Windows key and pressed the letter M. This brought the desktop to the forefront, and Boyd pressed the letter I to move to the Inbox Icon. He pressed enter and Microsoft Outlook was loaded into memory, and he waited to hear the chimes that signaled he had new mail. Until very recently, he had always used the Procomm software package to access the old DHCP and Forum electronic mail system, but this new system was just like the Internet access he used at home. Boyd heard the chimes, and he received a note from the presentation coordinator for the Closing the Gap Conference on Technology in Special Education and Rehabilitation. Boyd pressed enter, and the following message came on the screen.

Hello Netwatcher@med.va.gov, I wanted to send you this message and formally invite you to present your paper, Hanging Ten on the Internet Wave, at our conference in Minneapolis. The conference starts on the Third Wednesday in October and goes until that Saturday afternoon. If you

are interested, please send me a confirmation message. Once I have the confirmation, I will send you specific conference information.

Boyd held down the Alt key and pressed function key 4 to exit the message, and then, he held down the control key and pressed the letter R to reply to the invitation. After he typed the message accepting the invitation, he held down the Alt key and pressed the letter F to bring up the file menu. At the Send menu choice, he pressed enter, and the message was propelled towards Minneapolis, MN.

Boyd tried to get Kristal on the cell phone, but there was no answer. He went back to the computer, held down the control key and pressed the letter N to create a new message. At the To field, he typed **Kristal**@email.net. He pressed the tab key twice, and at the Subject field, he typed:

Let's go to Minneapolis.

He pressed the tab key one more time and typed the message to Kristal. When he was done, he held down the Alt key and pressed the letter F to bring up the file menu. At the Send menu choice, he pressed enter, and the message was sent to Kristal. Since he was done with Microsoft Outlook, he held down the Alt key and pressed function key 4, and the program was unloaded from the computer memory.

It was later that same afternoon, and Professor Julio Costa had just completed his meeting with the Director of the Southeastern Blind Rehabilitation Center, SBRC, in Birmingham, Alabama. He was very impressed with the available services and training for blind people to maximize their skills. He was at the SBRC to gain specific information to start a computer training program at the Brazilian Technical Institute, BTI, in Belem, Brazil. He made his way to room Z720, and as he looked into the room, he saw a man working at a computer. He cleared his throat and introduced himself to Boyd Carson. Carson stood up and shook Costa's hand. The man facing Costa was about 6 foot 2, 200 pounds with short dark hair and piercing hazel eyes. There was a bit of grey in his mustache and temples. He had on jeans, and Costa smiled as he read the, Technology: No place for wimps, patch that was on the man's shirt. Costa said he was at the SBRC to get information about computer access technology, and he was told

Boyd could introduce him to a variety of equipment. Costa apologized up front that he was not knowledgeable in these areas and hoped Boyd would be tolerant.

Boyd started his introduction by discussing the concept of Optical Character Recognition, OCR, and Boyd said, "Some people may use the generic term of reading machine to describe these systems. These devices often consist of a flat bed scanner which looks like a copy machine. Printed materials are placed print side down on the flat bed, and a picture or image is made of the printed material. The picture or image is analyzed by the artificial intelligent software and determines whether the letters are an A, B, or C. These letters and words are sent to a speech system, and the letters and words are spoken to the Blind person. It is very similar to the human vision/voice system. Our eyes look at print on paper, and these images are sent to our organic RAM, brain, where they are processed and interpreted. After the information is process, it is sent to the human speech box, and the letters and words are spoken."

Carson demonstrated the OCR process, and Costa was amazed how accurate the machine read the print. He asked, "Can these machines read hand writing?"

Boyd said, "At this point, they can't, but who knows what the future holds?"

After the OCR demonstration, Boyd told Costa about speech access for computers. "Speech systems have two components. The first component is a software program which processes and converts computerized information into speech. The second component is some type of speech synthesizer or processor, and these synthesizers are either internal or external. An external synthesizer connects to the serial or parallel port on the computer, and an internal synthesizer is a circuit board which is installed inside the computer in an available slot." Boyd also said the new sound cards that allow a computer to have all the bells and whistles can also be used as a speech synthesizer.

Carson opened up a computer and showed Costa an internal speech synthesizer and how it fit in the slot on the mother board. He showed Costa the ports on a computer where external synthesizers could be connected.

Costa noticed that the serial ports had pins , but the parallel ports had receptacles into which pins could be inserted.

Boyd said, "Both types of these synthesizers are widely used in the Blind business. After the software converts the information into speech, it is sent

to the speech synthesizer for the blind person to hear. It is very similar to the human speech system. When we want to speak, the information is processed in our organic RAM, brain, and sent to our human speech box.”

Boyd had Costa sit down at a computer and asked him to start typing. As he typed, all of his keystrokes were echoed to him through the speech synthesizer. Carson also showed Costa some of the advanced review features which allowed blind people to read various information anywhere on the monitor.

Boyd asked Costa to type in a sequence of commands and press enter. In a flash, the speech system was unloaded from the computer memory and a large print software system was loaded. Costa saw there was a larger image of various icons on the screen. Boyd showed him various commands to increase or decrease the size of the letters and ways to look at information anywhere on the monitor.

Boyd said, “Large print systems function similarly to speech systems. The computerized information is processed, and enlarged on the monitor. For some clients, both speech and large print are combined for dual sensory reinforcement.” Boyd told Costa there was still one more way for blind people to access information from a computer, and that was with a refreshable Braille device. “These devices use a six or eight dot Braille cell.”

Costa said, “I am familiar with the six dot Braille cell, but I have not heard of an eight dot Braille cell.”

The six dot Braille cell had been used primarily for printing Braille paper documents, and the eight dot Braille cell is used to represent all of the possible keystrokes on a computer keyboard. For the six dot cell, there are two dots on the top, two dots in the middle, and two dots on the bottom. For the eight dot Braille, there are two more dots at the bottom. In the six dot Braille cell, the dots going down the left side are numbered 1, 2, and 3, and the dots going down the right side are numbered 4, 5, and 6. In the eight dot Braille cell, the bottom left dot is number 7, and the bottom right dot is number 8. Different arrangements or combinations of these dots represent letters, numbers, and punctuation. In the refreshable Braille devices, the Braille dot is represented by a pin that moves up and down. For example, the computer cursor moves onto the letter *D* on the monitor, and the pins, 1, 4, and 5, are raised to make the Braille letter *D*. If the next letter is *R*, the pins, 1, 2, 3, and 5, will be raised to represent the Braille letter *R*.

Carson demonstrated a refreshable Braille device by typing on the keyboard and letting Costa feel the pins rise and fall as different letters were

typed. The device Costa was using had a twenty cell display, but Carson said, "Other devices have forty and eighty cell displays. The forty cell display will allow a blind person to read forty characters at a time, and an eighty cell display can allow a blind person to read eighty characters of information." Carson also showed some advanced features which could allow a blind person to read information at any location on the screen.

Boyd had a feeling Costa was getting close to sensory overload, but once he got cooking, it was hard to slow him down.

For the next demo, he took Costa to the Braille production area, and told him about producing hard copy Braille. Boyd said, "All of the SBRC training materials are produced with word processors. The Braille translator processes and converts the text in these documents into Braille symbols and these symbols are sent to a Braille printer. For example, a letter *D* that is sent to a Braille printer will make the impact pins strike the Braille paper in a combination that makes a Braille *D*."

Boyd printed some Braille documents for Costa and explained that this printer only prints on one side of the paper. "There are some interpoint printers that will print Braille on both sides of the paper. This can greatly reduce the amount of paper being used to print documents." Boyd also showed Costa some of the portable notetakers available for use by Blind people. "These notetakers use a standard or Braille keyboard layout, in that, the standard keyboard is arranged like a regular keyboard, but the Braille keyboard usually has a key to represent each Braille dot and other keys for additional functions. The blind person would press different combinations of these keys to make Braille letters, numbers, and punctuation. They can have speech and/or refreshable Braille output. These systems are very light in weight, and many blind people find them to be quite functional."

Carson let Costa press different key combinations in Braille, and the letters were spoken and raised up on the Braille display.

For the final show stopper, Carson took Costa to a computer on a large table. Carson grabbed a microphone and said, "Wake up."

As Costa heard some chimes from the speakers, Carson said, "Start Microsoft Word," and the Microsoft Word word processing program was opened.

Boyd said, "Hello, Dr. Costa, I hope you are enjoying the demonstration today," and the words were spoken as they appeared on the computer monitor. Carson said, "Go to sleep," and the computer started to snore. Carson said this was a voice recognition and speech output system they were evaluating for one

of the veterans who was blind and was a double arm amputee.

“This veteran will be able to speak commands, and the computer will implement the commands. He will also be able to hear the implementation of these commands through the speech output system.”

Costa was totally amazed at this technology, and Carson said, “This kind of technology could really help a lot of the veterans who could not use a standard keyboard.”

The demonstration ended, and they both went back to Carson’s office. Costa was very impressed with the demo, and he said he had been to a Southeastern based company called Techno Tiger.com, and they had recommended some equipment for his computer program.

Costa asked if Carson would look at the list to see if it was a good system.

Costa apologized saying that he was not suspicious, but he did not know much about this technology.

Boyd took the list over to his closed circuit television, CCTV, and set the list on the X/Y table. Costa had seen CCTV’s before, and he was amazed how they magnified print so large. Boyd set the magnification for forty five times and adjusted the paper for viewing. Retinitis Pigmentosa had taken a lot of Boyd’s vision, but the son of a bitch still left enough to function pretty well. Techno Tiger.com was recommending a Tiger Star computer system with sufficient central processing unit, memory, and storage to last well into the future. The OCR system would be able to read English and Portuguese printed materials. In the area of word processing, they were recommending the English and Portuguese version of Microsoft Word. In the area of speech access, they were recommending the JAWS for Windows software program which would speak both Portuguese and English. In the area of large print software, they were recommending ZoomtextExtra, and in the area of Braille production, they were recommending the Duxbury Braille translation software and the ET Interpoint Braille printer.

Boyd handed the list back to Costa, and said he was very impressed with this recommendation.

Carson said he had worked with all of these systems, and they were very durable and reliable.

After Boyd’s comment, Costa was sure he had found the right person to train his people. Costa offered Boyd the training job, and a smile came to Boyd’s face. He thought about some of the other great training jobs he had done while working at the Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision, RRTC, at Mississippi State University. He thought of Toronto,

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Canada, American Samoa, and Vienna, Austria.

Costa said he had set aside the first two weeks in March for the training program, and the BTI would pay for all of his travel expenses.

Boyd said he could see no problems, but he wasn't sure how the federal government dealt with these situations and wanted to check on VA policy. Boyd shook Costa's hand, and Costa walked to the elevators.

Chapter 3

The Accident

Roberto Vocha sat at his 486 DX computer, pressed ALT D, and typed an M followed by the secret phone number to the main BBS computer located on his property. It was on his property, but nobody could ever find the self-contained underground vault. Vocha had a plantation about 30 miles from Belem, Brazil, and he had the vault built about six years ago. The vault had been built in Belem, and he had transported it personally to a secret location on his plantation. On paper, he was a simple grower of tropical fruit trees, but in reality, he was one of the biggest cocaine suppliers for Miami, New York, Dallas, Los Angeles, and Seattle.

When Vocha connected to the BBS, he typed in the first of five passwords to gain access to the main menu. He chose the group conference mode from the menu and pressed enter. Just like clockwork, Jones from New York, Butler from Miami, Andrews from Dallas, Lincoln from Los Angeles, and Perkins from Seattle logged onto the group. The group discussed shipping problems, cost per kilo, currency transfer protocols, and other things you would normally hear during a business conference. Vocha smiled as he thought how easy it was to conduct business on the electronic super highway. The group concluded their business, and made plans for the next meeting which would be on the first Saturday in March at 8:30 p.m. central time. He logged off the BBS and turned off the computer. Vocha calculated the time of the next meeting by subtracting 2 hours times the third month which made the meeting at 2:30 central time.

A frantic knock came to the door, and Vocha opened it to find Rudolfo Carta. He waved Rudolfo into the room and sat behind his desk. Rudolfo

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was one of Vocha's most trusted associates, and he said one of the cocaine processing plants up the Amazon was raided by the federals.

A huge rage engulfed Vocha, and he slammed his fist on the desk. That was the last thing he remembered.

Chapter 4

The Plan Begins

Professor Julio Costa sat in his office at the Brazilian Technical Institute, and in his hand, he held a memo from Boyd Carson, and as he read, a smile came to his face. The memo read:

As a government employee, I was going to request authorized absence, AA, to provide training on your technology. To use AA, I have to submit paperwork at least 60 days before the trip. I could not provide training for you until the middle of April, and if the second Tuesday in April works with your schedule, we can firm up these arrangements. I can leave about two weeks later on a Wednesday flight from Belem.

I thank you for considering me for this training, and I look forward to the training program.

Costa put the memo in the file folder and dictated a letter to Boyd Carson. He said the dates would work very well with his schedule, and he looked forward to the meeting. The equipment from Techno Tiger.com would be arriving in a few weeks, and his dreams of having an excellent computer training program for Blind Brazilians would come true.

As Costa pondered his fortune, Rudolfo Carta knocked on the door. Carta was one of Costa's most brilliant graduates.

He ushered his former student into the office and closed the door. Costa asked, "What can I do for you?"

Rudolfo wanted information about computer technology for Blind people.

Carta said a friend of his had recently been blinded, and he wanted to see if he could help this friend.

This was an amazing coincidence, and Costa started to tell Rudolfo about his visit to Alabama, and the expertise of Boyd Carson. “I have invited Senor Carson to train my staff at the BTI, but he is not going to be available for the training until the middle of April.” Costa said they had ordered some equipment for the Blind, and it would be here in a few weeks. Perhaps this friend could come to the institute once his staff was trained.

Rudolfo said, “That could be a possibility, but in the meantime, could I have the address and phone number of Senor Carson and the technology company?”

Carta wanted to send for information, and Costa gave him the information on Carson, Techno Tiger.com, and the list of equipment he had purchased.

Rudolfo thanked the Professor for the information, left the BTI, and drove back to the plantation.

Rudolfo looked at his boss through the patio door, and took a few minutes to compose himself. It was just after 12 noon, and Roberto Vocha sat under an umbrella in a lounge chair on his veranda. It was a bright, beautiful day, but for Vocha, he sat in total darkness. It was just two weeks ago, but it seemed like an eternity. Vocha had slammed his fist on the desk, grabbed the back of his head, passed out, and slumped to the floor.

Rudolfo could not believe his eyes, but he did not waste any time. He summoned the helicopter and got Vocha to the hospital.

The doctors said he had a hemorrhage in the occipital lobe of his brain, and he could very well lose his sight permanently.

Rudolfo could not believe the news, but he knew one thing, the news of Vocha’s illness would need to be kept quiet. Rudolfo stayed with Vocha the entire time, and when Vocha woke up in the hospital room, he had a huge headache. He began to move very carefully. First his toes, his legs, his arms, and then his fingers.

Rudolfo saw him moving, and stepped to his boss’ bedside.

Vocha asked what had happened, and Carta told him everything except the Blindness thing. Vocha asked Carta to turn up the lights so he could see better, and with a great deal of apprehension, Carta told him the lights were on in the room. The silence was deafening, and with more calm than Carta expected, Vocha asked him to get the doctor.

It had been a long two weeks, and Vocha was still blind. The doctors had

told him there was a small chance he would gain some vision, but they were not very optimistic. Vocha heard a door open, and the 357 Magnum, a gift from his New York connection, slipped flawlessly out of the shoulder holster into his right hand.

Rudolfo told the boss it was him and took a lounge chair near him. Carta told the boss about his conversation with the professor, and Vocha asked if Costa seemed suspicious.

Carta said, "He still thinks I make a living selling computers."

Vocha considered all of this information and pondered the possibilities.

It was later that afternoon when Vocha told Carta of his plans. Carta said the plan sounded good, but he would be able to help him with the computer to run the business. Vocha said he appreciated the offer, but if he told Carta the passwords, he would be vulnerable to kidnapping and torture. Carta was like a son to Vocha, and he would not want to risk his young life.

Chapter 5

The Kidnapping

Boyd made it to the northeast corner of 8th Avenue and 18th Street, and took a little zig to the left to find the curb. Boyd tapped the tip of his collapsible cane on the curb, so he wouldn't step into the street. He checked his talking watch, and the fine little lady inside said it was 4:02.

As he took his wrist away from his ear, he heard the familiar sound the red rocket makes as it comes to a stop. He found the door handle, collapsed his cane, and opened the door. He waited to hear Kristal's voice, and when she said, "Hello, Boyd," in that subtle but distinctive southern way she talked, he got in the car. As he got comfortable in the seat, he smelled Kristal's perfume. He sure liked that Giorgio. He closed the car door, and because cities are cities, he lifted his right elbow to lock the door. Before he could get his elbow up, the electric door lock was engaged and set into the permanent locked position.

The red rocket did not have electric door locks, and Boyd said, "What the hell is going on?"

A co-worker of Boyd's saw him get into the candy apple red convertible, and thought that something was different. He thought Boyd had a 92 model, and he didn't remember the windows being that tinted. Oh well, it must be the light.

Rudolfo headed west on 8th Avenue towards I65, and he spoke in a low, menacing tone. Carta said, "Mr. Carson, you need to recline your seat all the way back," and since Boyd was still taking it all in, he complied. He knew it would be more prudent to take a chill pill, so he took a deep breath and concentrated on everything. Boyd could tell they had gotten on I65 south, and they drove for about twenty-five minutes before they got off and drove east

on some road. With the time factor, they were probably going east on Valleydale or I19. They drove for about five minutes and turned right into a gravel driveway. They went for about fifty yards and came to a stop.

Carson and Carta got out of the car and Rudolfo offered a sighted guide elbow. Boyd thought at least the jerk knew something about blindness. Boyd could have made a big show of independence, but he used this opportunity to gather in more information about this kidnapper.

As they walked, Boyd took in the smells of an early spring and even heard some poor jerk mowing the lawn about 50 yards to his left.

Kristal took a left onto 18th Street and noticed Boyd was not on the corner. He had probably gone back upstairs, so she pulled into a parking spot and gave him a call on the cell phone. She dialed the number, and after a few rings, she got his answering machine, and she heard, "This is Boyd Carson, leave me a message and I'll get back to you as soon as possible," in that overenthusiastic voice of his. Kristal disconnected the call and considered what might have happened. They were supposed to go to the local watering hole for a few beers, and Boyd must have gotten a ride with someone. If he had gotten a ride, he would have called her on the cell phone.

As Kristal sat there in the car, one of Boyd's co-workers came down the ramp, and Kristal honked the horn for him to come over to the car.

Carl had returned to his office to get his knapsack, and when he heard the horn, he went over to the car. He said, "Hello."

Kristal asked him if he had seen Boyd. He said he saw Boyd get into a red convertible a little after 4:00. This did not make sense, so Kristal told Carl she was heading to the watering hole.

She pulled into a parking space, got out of the car, and headed for the pub door. She walked into the pub and saw a few of the regulars, but they had not seen Boyd. She went back to the car, and a slow, sick feeling came over her and she started to cry. She didn't know what was going on, but she knew something was wrong. She had met Boyd at that corner for the entire time he had been working at the SBRC. She had to call someone, but who would she call?

Clyde Jenkins had been a special agent for the FBI for eight years, but he had only been at the Birmingham station for a little over a year. Clyde's phone buzzed, and as he picked it up, he looked at the clock. It was 4:45, and Lisa, the station secretary, told him there was a very, and she emphasized the word

very upset lady on the phone, so, Lisa sent him the call.

Clyde said, "This is special agent Jenkins. May I help you?"

A voice came over the phone, and Kristal Carson identified herself. Clyde asked what he could do for her today, and Kristal said, sobbing, "My husband has been kidnapped."

A, "Sure lady," look came over Clyde's face, but being a good government servant, he prompted her for more information.

Kristal told him about the other convertible, and how Boyd's co-worker saw him get into the car. Clyde asked for more specific information about the car, and Kristal said the co-worker said it was a red convertible just like hers.

It was close to 5:00, and Clyde was getting impatient with the call. He said, "Excuse me, Mrs. Carson, is your husband blind? He should know not to hop into a strange car."

Kristal's face turned blood red, and she said, "As a matter of fact, butthead, my husband is blind, and he probably couldn't tell it was a strange car."

The phone was dead silent for a long time before Clyde composed himself. He apologized profusely and thought how this screw up could roast his government hide. He told Mrs. Carson he needed to meet with her to get more specific details. The circumstances seemed strange, but he really needed to meet with this lady to save his butt. He asked where she was, and Kristal said she was parked in her car at the northeast corner of 8th Avenue and 18th Street.

Clyde said he would be there in about fifteen minutes.

Holding Rudolfo's right elbow, Boyd Carson followed him, and said, "Since you seem to know who I am, do I get to know your name?"

"I am Ernesto, and for now that is all you need to know." Ernesto held his right elbow close to his body, and as they walked, Boyd could feel something hard around Ernie's chest. It was hard like leather, and Boyd figured it was a shoulder holster. Boyd thought to himself that this jerk means business. Ernesto spoke very good English, but Boyd couldn't place the accent. The man guiding Boyd seemed about 5 foot 10 inches tall and didn't seem to be very heavy. Ernesto's right arm was very muscular, so Boyd figured the guy works out. They climbed three steps onto a porch, and it took about six paces to make it to the front door. The wood below their feet echoed, and Boyd thought the porch was about forty feet wide. This was a big place.

Ernesto unlocked the door, and they stepped into a large room with high ceilings. They felt about fourteen feet high, and Boyd noticed the room was

quite bright. They walked across the hardwood floor, and Ernesto placed Boyd's left hand on the arm of a couch and asked him to be seated. He sat down, and listened as Ernesto went to a door in the back of the house, opened it, and spoke what sounded like Spanish to someone in the room. Boyd would've tried for the front door, but he had heard Ernie use a key to secure the deadbolt. Boyd heard Ernie come up a hallway into the room and take a seat about five feet from him. He heard a door on the right, no left, of the hallway open and somebody came into the hallway. Boyd heard footsteps, but he also heard the tap, tap, tap of a cane. This person was blind. That's how Ernie got so talented in the blindness area.

Roberto Vocha walked into the room, used the cane to find a chair, and sat across from Carson. "Hello, Senor Carson, I am Ronaldo Diaz, and I am sorry we had to meet under these unusual circumstances."

"Unusual hell," said Boyd. "What makes me so special you had to resort to kidnapping?"

"I will explain in due time, but for now, can I offer you something to drink?"

Boyd was pretty thirsty, so he asked for a beer.

Ernie got up and went down the hallway, and Boyd heard a refrigerator door open and close in a room on the right side of the hallway towards the back. Boyd took the beer from Ernie, took a sip, and asked Ronaldo to explain what the hell was going on.

Chapter 6

The Invasion

As the Emigration Agent at the Miami International Airport said, “Next,” he looked up to find two gentlemen standing at the counter. He asked for their passports, and the documents were handed to him. He opened the first passport, and with a question in his voice he said, “Ernesto Diaz?”

“I am Ernesto Diaz,” said the younger man.

“Are you here for business or pleasure?” asked the agent.

Ernesto said he was accompanying his uncle to the United States to obtain training on his computer. He said the uncle was recently blinded, and since there was no training of this type in his area in Brazil, they were coming to the U.S. for the training.

The agent looked at the other passport, and asked Ernesto if this was Ronaldo Diaz.

Is this the way it will always be? asked Vocha to himself. *Just because I am blind, these people think I cannot answer my own questions.* In a calm tone Vocha said, “I am Ronaldo Diaz.”

The agent asked a few more questions, and since these two seemed okay, he checked and stamped their passports and visas.

The two of them retrieved their bags from carousel two and made their way to the customs agent. The agent asked the two of them if they had anything to declare, and they both said no. Ernesto pointed to the box that contained the computer equipment, and said it was the personal property of his blind uncle.

The agent looked at the box, back at Ernesto, and then to the older gentleman. This man wore sunglasses and had a grip on the younger man’s left elbow. The custom agent let them through, and Rudolfo led Vocha down the

corridor followed by the porter with their bags and boxes. Vocha sat on a bench with the porter while Rudolfo went to the car rental counter. He made arrangements for the van, and the rental agent said it would be around in a few minutes.

Rudolfo made his way to the row of lockers near concourse F and found locker number 265. He pulled the key out of his coat pocket and put it in the lock. He opened the door and the medium sized bag was there. He took out the bag and closed the locker. He did not have to look in the bag, because the Miami connections were always very reliable.

He made his way to Vocha, and the two of them headed for the rental car pick-up area. A two toned blue Ford Aerostar pulled up, and the driver hopped out and yelled for Mr. Diaz. Rudolfo showed him the rental agreement, got the keys, loaded the bags and boxes, and helped Vocha into the van. He tipped the porter and climbed into the van.

He made his way towards the interstate, and when he found the exit, he headed north on I95. They left I95 and got onto the Florida Turnpike and pointed the van towards Orlando. All during the trip, Rudolfo told Vocha of the scenery, and as Carta talked, Vocha smiled and thought of the time he first met Rudolfo. The Sancho cartel had attacked the plantation to take over Vocha's dynasty, and Carta's father had fought gallantly to save the plantation. Sancho's men had been killed, but Rudolfo's father was also one of the casualties. Rudolfo saw his father die, but instead of freezing, he grabbed his father's gun and killed many of the intruders. Rudolfo was sixteen at that time, and since he had no other family, Vocha had somewhat adopted him into his family. Vocha had sponsored his education at the Brazilian Technical Institute, and Carta had graduated with honors. He had also done very well at the military training camp sponsored by Vocha. He had become very well versed in the tactics of gorilla warfare, and Carta had become almost like a son to Vocha. The mission they were on was extremely important, and Vocha was very confident in the possibility of success.

Outside of Orlando, they stopped at the Turtle Neck service plaza to get some food, but as they ate, they talked of the great food they had left in Brazil. Carta and Vocha were especially fond of Tucubi and Manicoba, but they would have to settle for this food.

They made it to I75 and turned north towards I10. It had been a long day, so they stopped at a hotel outside of Gainesville.

Before they re-started their road trip, Rudolfo got the phone numbers of five Birmingham real estate agents, and on the third call, he hit the jackpot. The

agent had a large, completely furnished house in north Shelby County that was secluded but near Birmingham. The agent also said it was available for immediate occupancy, so Rudolfo made an appointment for noon in two days.

Rudolfo and Vocha hit the road, traveled west on I10, and turned north on SR231 and crossed the Alabama line. They were both amazed how easy it was to cross borders in the U.S. compared to their country. They drove through Dothan and stopped in Montgomery for the night.

Rudolfo had made arrangements to meet with the real estate agent at the house to minimize exposure. He was traveling north on I65 and was about to exit onto I19. He went east for about five minutes and turned right onto a gravel driveway. He went about fifty yards and came to a stop near a jet black Ford Mustang. Rudolfo got out of the van, and at the same time so did Rick Sims. Rick noticed the other man in the van, but he wasn't getting out of the car.

Rudolfo and Rick shook hands and introduced themselves. Rudolfo said his name was Ernesto Diaz and he was a consultant with the Brazilian Technical Institute in Belem, Brazil, and he was going to work at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, UAB, for about six months. He had also brought his blind uncle with him to get him out of his depression.

As they walked through the house and property, Rick said UAB would be a good place to work. Rudolfo said the place was great, and he would like to rent it for the six months. Rick said the rent was \$2,500.00 per month with one months deposit. Rudolfo said that was acceptable and gave him the cash. Rudolfo signed the lease and thanked Rick for working with him under these extraordinary circumstances. He did not want to go to the office, because he wanted to get his uncle settled in as fast as possible. Rick told Rudolfo the house was completely furnished including phone and utilities, so the house was ready for immediate occupancy. He gave them the keys, got in his car, pulled onto the road, and drove away.

Carta helped Vocha into the house, and had him sit on a couch in the large living room. He brought the bags and boxes from the van, and put them just inside to the right of the front door. He closed the front door and keyed the deadbolt.

Over the next few days, Vocha familiarized himself with all of the rooms of the house. He had chosen the first room on the left as you go down the hallway. It was quite a large room, and as Rudolfo had said, the bed was at 12 o'clock, a large walk-in closet and bathroom were at 3 o'clock, and a large desk was at 9 o'clock. They had set up the computer on the large desk, and Rudolfo had connected the phone line to the modem.

Chapter 7

The Setup

Kidnap minus 5 days

It was 4:01, and Rudolfo was parked on the northeast corner of 8th Avenue and 18th Street. He had already fed the fifteen minute meter 6 times, but he did not want to lose this parking spot. He had found out that the Blind rehab staff left work at 4:00, and it was the best vantage point to see everything happening at this corner. He saw a man coming down the ramp heading for the northeast corner. The man fit the description he had been given by Professor Costa.

Boyd Carson tapped his way to the corner, and Rudolfo saw a red convertible stop, and Carson opened the door. The woman inside the car said something, Carson collapsed his cane, and he got in. Carta figured that Carson waited to hear the lady's voice before he got into the car, so he would have to figure this into his plan.

The convertible took a right on 18th Street, took a right on 7th Avenue, went two blocks and took a right on 20th Street. Rudolfo followed the car for many blocks, they both drove up a winding mountain road, and took a right on Valley Avenue. Rudolfo saw the car take a right onto Beacon Parkway East and proceed up the mountain. He followed the car until it took a left into a large condominium complex. Rudolfo drove past the complex to the end of the road, turned around, and drove slowly by the entrance. He noticed the security guard, called it a day, and made his way back to the house on 119.

Kidnap minus 4 days

It was 7:00 in the morning, and Rudolfo was parked at the gas station on the corner of Beacon Parkway East and Valley. The red convertible came by at 7:05 and took a left on Valley. Rudolfo followed the car back to the Blind center, and Carson was let off at the same corner from the previous day.

After Kristal let Boyd out on the corner, she headed towards the UAB campus for her morning class. Kristal parked the car, got out, and headed for her algebra class. She did not notice the two-tone, blue Aerostar van park a few rows away. Rudolfo got out of the van and followed Kristal through the hallways until she went into a room. He waited for about an hour, a bell rang, and Kristal exited the room. Rudolfo watched the people leaving the room and considered each one very carefully. About half the class had filed out of the room when he saw a likely assistant for his plan. He approached the young lady and began talking to her about classes.

Kidnap minus 3 days

Kristal sat at a small table in a coffee shop near the UAB campus and studied her college algebra. This class was really a bear, but she was finally getting a grip on the topic. Kristal took a sip of her coffee and remembered her parent's 50th anniversary. Boyd had worn his blue pin-striped suit, and she had worn her new blue dress. Kristal had to admit they looked pretty good, and the parents had a great time at the reception.

As Kristal got back to algebra, Judy Simpson walked into the coffee shop, looked from table to table, and finally went over to Kristal's table. As she approached the table, Judy noticed that the lady at the table had short, frosted hair, and she wore glasses. If she had to guess, she would say the lady was about 5 feet 4 inches tall and about 132 pounds.

Judy introduced herself to Kristal, and Kristal did the same. Judy was about five foot eight and about 115 pounds. She had long brunette hair and green eyes. Judy said she was in Kristal's algebra class, and she was having a hard time with the subject. Kristal didn't remember this person, but it was a large class. They started talking about the class, problems they were both having, and soon they were talking about everything under the sun. When they were done, Kristal recommended a couple of tutors to help Judy with the class, and Judy thanked her for the information.

Judy left the coffee shop, took a right and headed for the corner. At the corner, she handed the tape recorder to the man, and she took the envelope. She looked inside the envelope, and the thousand dollars was there. She didn't know what was going on, but this guy had offered her good money to sit with the lady in the coffee shop, get her to talk about things, and record the conversation. Later that afternoon, Rudolfo sat and listened to the tape of the coffee shop conversation. When he heard something he could use on the tape, he made note of the number on the digital counter. Later, he would splice the tape to say the appropriate words. Rudolfo also made notes of some items he needed to purchase. On the top of the list was a perfume called Giorgio.

Kidnap minus 2 days

It had taken about 5 calls, but Rudolfo had finally found a candy apple red convertible to rent for the next few days. It was at the airport, so he drove the van to the long term parking area and parked it on the top floor. To look inconspicuous, he grabbed a small garment bag out of the van and headed for the car rental area. In about 35 minutes, he was heading south on I65. Rudolfo got off of I65, took a left and then a right onto Green Springs. He came up and took a left on Valley, drove two blocks and took a left onto Beacon Parkway East. He took a right into the gas station on the corner and waited for the red convertible to pass by the station. The car passed by at 3:45, took a left onto Valley Avenue, and now, Carta had only one more stop before he headed back to Vocha. He found a small shop in Homewood, and he purchased a small bottle of Giorgio. He thanked the cashier, and she said she hoped his girlfriend liked the perfume. Rudolfo said she would, and he made his way back to the car and went home.

Kidnapped

Carta had been scoping out this bar for the last few days, and he thought he had found two guys to fill the bill. He had talked to each of them, and if they showed up, everything would be in place. He checked his watch, and it was 2:10. They were supposed to be here at 2:00, but it wasn't too late. It was 2:20 when they walked into the bar, and they came over to Carta's table. The talkative one was named Gomez, and the other guy was named Buzzzzz. They

both had their cars ready and wanted to get on with the plan. Carta gave each man a thousand dollars and gave them their assignment.

As Gomez and Buzz went to their cars, they both laughed about how easy money this was. Buzz followed Gomez to the gas station on the corner of Beacon Parkway East and waited for the appointed time. At 3:40, Buzz went up the hill, turned around, and made his way back down the hill. As Buzz made his way down the hill, Gomez was driving up the hill. When they got beside each other, they stopped, and just like the guy said, a red convertible was coming down the hill. Gomez and Buzz acted like they were conducting big business and made the lady wait at least 10 minutes. The lady honked, and Gomez said he was conducting some business, and she would have to wait a few minutes. The lady said something he could not understand, made a three point turn, and headed up the mountain. Gomez checked his watch, and it was 3:55. The two guys left the scene, and made their way back to the bar for a great party time.

It was 3:55, and Rudolfo was only a few blocks from the Blind rehab center. He pulled into a parking space, but he left the engine running. He put the car in park and tested the hand held tape player. He pushed the play button, and the voice of Kristal Carson came out of the machine. Once he was satisfied with his reaction time, he put the tape player in his lap and took out the Giorgio. He sprayed a good amount on himself, and made a face at the scent. It was a nice perfume for a woman, but on a man, it was not very manly. *Well, you gotta do what you gotta do*, thought Carta, and the tape and perfume were imperative to get Carson into the car. If he was the least bit suspicious, he could bolt, and the plan would be ruined.

Carta pulled onto 8th Avenue, headed west, and at 4:01, he arrived at the corner. Boyd Carson was at the curb, and when the car stopped, Carson moved towards the car. As Carson opened the car door, Carta pushed the button on the tape player. The voice of Kristal Carson came out and Carson collapsed his cane and got in the car. The door closed, Carta hit the electric door lock, and headed west towards I65.

Chapter 8

The Questions

It was 5:15 when Kristal saw the car pull up behind the red rocket. A guy about 30 got out of the car and made his way to Kristal. He came up to Kristal's window and showed his ID, and he asked if he could sit in the passenger seat to talk. Clyde Jenkins was about 6 feet tall and about 195 pounds. He had dirty blond hair and hazel eyes. Kristal thought how much his eyes reminded her of Boyd's. He was wearing a blue suit with a plain shirt and tie.

First off, he apologized for the crack about her husband, and she said there were no hard feelings. This was not a great day, and it didn't seem to be getting any better. Clyde slowly questioned Kristal to get as much information as possible, and after about a half hour, Clyde got a weird feeling in his gut. This did look like a kidnapping, but it didn't fit. Carson is a government worker with just a small amount of cash in the bank. His and Kristal's family do not have big money, so if he was kidnapped, what was the payoff? Kristal said Boyd was always careful, but why did he get into a strange car. The only leads were the red convertible, and the eyewitness had been a co-worker.

Clyde told Kristal he would go back to the office and make some inquiries. He got the name of the co-worker, gave Kristal a card with his name and number, and got out of the car.

As Kristal headed back toward the condo, she thought of Boyd, and her eyes started to tear.

Chapter 9

The House

It took Ronaldo Diaz two beers to finish the story he was telling Boyd Carson. Diaz said he was a rich tropical fruit farmer from Brazil, and he had recently been blinded from a stroke. He said he depended greatly on his computer to keep up with his vast holdings, and with his vision loss, this was obviously a problem. There are minimal services in Brazil to train blind people in computers, so he had to find other options.

Ernesto, his nephew, had been a student at the Brazilian Technical Institute, and one of his professor's, Dr. Julio Costa, had told Ernesto of Boyd's technology expertise.

In a pissed off voice, Carson said, "That's why Costa was so interested in technology in January."

Ronaldo responded quickly in that Costa had no idea of his blindness, and he was not involved in this endeavor. Costa is a professor of high regard in Brazil, and he was only the catalyst which led them to Carson.

"Hell," Carson said sarcastically, "one of these days I'll have to thank him for the reference."

As Diaz continued with his story, he told Carson he needed his training to access the information with his computer. Diaz had acquired the MSDOS version of the speech system Techno Tiger Inc. had recommended to Costa. Ernesto got up and walked to a room in the back of the house and returned to the living room. He sat on the couch near Boyd and pulled two boxes from a bag. In one box, he said there was the JAWS for DOS speech software package, and in the other box, there was the DecTalk Express external speech synthesizer.

A weird look came over Boyd's face, and Ernesto asked him what was the matter. Boyd said it was pretty funny that he was sitting here casually with his kidnappers talking about technology. "Which brings up a question," Boyd said. "Why did you have to go to such elaborate measures? You could have just called me and offered me a job."

Ronaldo said that would not have worked, because as he said earlier, he was very wealthy and powerful, and if news of his blindness was known, he could lose important leverage in his circle of friends. Since he did all of his work from the computer, he could learn to use the technology, and nobody would know a blind man was communicating with them on the other side. Boyd told them he thought it was a bunch of bull, but since he had to stay with them for awhile, he might as well have another beer.

Boyd had another beer while the two of them told him of Brazil and the plantations, and Boyd thought they knew a hell of a lot about tropical fruit trees. When he was done with his beer, he asked Ernie to escort him to the restroom.

Ronaldo told Ernie to introduce Carson to the entire house, and Ernesto took him towards the hallway.

"The first room on the left is my uncle's room," said Ernie. "The first room on the right is yours, Senor Carson." They went farther down the hall, and there was another room on the left. Ernie said that was his room. The last area on the right was a large kitchen and dining room. Ernesto oriented Carson to the kitchen, dining room, the living room, and took him to his room. In Carson's room, the bed was at 9 o'clock, a dresser was at 12 o'clock, and the closet and bathroom were at 3 o'clock.

Boyd took care of business in the bathroom, and with Ernie's help, they moved into Ronaldo's bedroom. He was taken to the desk, and Diaz showed him his computer. Diaz said it was an 80486 computer with 16 megabytes of memory and a 580 megabyte hard drive. Boyd felt the front of the computer and noticed a CD-ROM drive, 1 3.5 inch and 1 5.25 inch floppy drives. He felt the back of the computer and noticed a monitor port, phone modem, 1 serial, and 1 parallel port. Ronaldo said it was an old clone he had purchased about six years ago, and he never got it updated, because he was very comfortable with the system and software.

"Back then, this was high technology," said Boyd, "but it still is a good machine."

Ronaldo said he wanted to start as soon as possible, but Boyd said he hadn't eaten since lunch, and if they didn't mind, he wanted to get some chow. "After all, everybody works better on a full stomach."

NETWATCHER

Ronaldo asked Ernie to prepare some food, and he cooked some wild concoction that burned the heck out of Boyd's mouth. Ernesto saw Carson's reaction to the spices, and he joked that he had made it mild for his guest of honor.

Boyd said he couldn't eat any more of this stuff, and if they wanted him to be a happy little camper, they needed to get some good food. Boyd checked his watch, and it was already 8:30. He wondered what Kristal was doing.

Chapter 10

More Questions

Kristal had gotten back to the condo at about 6:15, and she wanted to call somebody, but agent Jenkins said she should keep quiet for a time until he checked out a few things. It was 8:30, she had no call from any kidnapper and no call from the FBI agent. She held the cordless phone in her right hand and willed it to ring. It didn't, so she opened the screen door and walked onto the balcony. The stars were bright tonight, and there was a cool breeze. Kristal looked at the lights of south Birmingham and wondered about Boyd.

When Clyde Jenkins got back to the office, he found Lisa at her desk. She had a feeling he might need her tonight, so she had stayed for awhile. Clyde told Lisa the story, and they started to contact the local car rental agencies. Clyde called Carson's co-worker, but he didn't have any additional information. All he saw was Boyd climb into a candy apple red convertible. He could not see through the tinted windows, and he wasn't sure if it was a rental. Since they stopped identifying rental cars, it was difficult to tell. The co-worker said he would call if he remembered any more information, and Clyde hung up the phone.

Lisa knew the drill, and in a little over three hours, she had checked all of the car rental agency computers in Birmingham. Two red convertibles had been rented in the last four days. One was rented by a businessman named John Platter, and according to the rental agreement, he was staying at the Radison on 8th Avenue for a few days. Jenkins made a phone call to the hotel and talked to Platter for about a half an hour. Everything

seemed in order, so Clyde concentrated on the other rental.

The other car had been rented by Ernesto Diaz, and he was a citizen of Brazil. He had not stated his residence while in the Birmingham area. Clyde ran the names through the computer, and there was nothing on Mr. Platter, but when he put in the name of Ernesto Diaz, a priority alias alert came on the screen. A picture of Rudolfo Carta came on the screen with a list of his exploits. Carta's list of known associates was very interesting, and one name jumped out at Clyde. Roberto Vocha was a major leader in the cocaine market, but what would they want with Carson?

The phone rang at 10:30, and Kristal answered it, hoping it was Boyd. Clyde Jenkin's voice came over the phone, and he said he thought he might have something, but he wasn't sure. He wanted to meet with Kristal and talk about his findings.

Kristal called the security guard, and told him she was expecting a visitor.

When the guy pulled up and identified himself, the guard told him where to park and how to get to the Carson's condominium. He got to the condo at 11:00, and Kristal let him in the door. She offered him something to drink, but Clyde declined.

As Jenkins walked into the condo, he noticed a treadmill, desk, couch, and recliner along the right side of the living room, and an entertainment center and a sliding glass door up ahead on the left. He also noticed a hallway on the left that went towards the kitchen and another room on the right. Clyde sat on the couch, and Kristal sat in her recliner. To start off, Clyde asked who they knew in Brazil.

Kristal said they didn't know anybody in Brazil, and then she remembered about the training program in April. Kristal told Clyde about the training program for the Brazilian Technical Institute, and Clyde remembered that Carta was a graduate of the institute. He didn't know the connection, but it was there.

He didn't want to ask, but he knew he had to ask. "Does Boyd use or know anybody who deals in cocaine?"

Kristal looked at Clyde and started to laugh. "Boyd likes beer and partying, but he would never get a monkey like that on his back."

This lady was genuine, and Clyde believed her. Clyde said a guy that rented a red convertible in the last few days was a known associate of a major cocaine distributor. The same guy was also a graduate of the BTI

that Boyd was going to provide training for in April. He did not know the connection, but once they found it, they would find out why Boyd was kidnapped. Jenkins said he would call her if he got any more news.

Clyde called the office from his car phone, but there was no response to the APB he had issued on Carta and the car earlier. He told the night watch he was going home, and they said they would call with any new information. Jenkins got home about 12:30, and as he entered his lonely apartment, he wondered about the connection.

Kristal sat in her recliner and stared at the lights of south Birmingham, and as she remembered the day's activities, she began to cry. The next thing she knew, she was waking up the next morning.

Chapter 11

Technology and memories

Something woke Boyd up, and he checked his talking watch, and the little lady said it was 8:30 in the morning. For a minute, Boyd didn't remember where he was, but it only took a few minutes for reality to return. As he lay in bed, he remembered the events of the previous night.

They had finished that crappy meal, and they had gone back to Ronoldo's room. Carson said he had to install the DecTalk Express. He connected the serial cable to the serial port and plugged in the power cord to the DecTalk. He reconnected the power cord to the computer and turned on the system. The computer went through its usual routine, and Ernesto said the `c:\` prompt was on the monitor.

All of a sudden, Boyd started sniffing over the Central Processing Unit, C.P.U., and in a panicked voice, Ernesto asked what was the matter. Boyd said he thought he smelled smoke, paused for a few seconds, and then he looked up at Ernesto with a smile and said, "I gotcha, kidnap boy!"

Ernesto laughed slightly and told Boyd he had to work on his sense of humor. Before he installed the DecTalk software, he made a directory called *spare* and copied everything from the root directory into spare.

"If something goes wrong during the installation process, we can copy these files and start over."

While Ernesto read the information on the screen, Carson typed the installation commands for the DecTalk software. Once the installation process was completed, Boyd re-booted the computer, and the familiar DecTalk version 4.2C is running came over the speaker.

At this point, Carson said they needed to install the JAWS speech software

onto the hard drive, and Ernesto asked if this was a difficult process. Carson said most speech software packages are easy to install. Boyd got the JAWS software from Ernesto, and with his help, they installed and registered the software to Ronaldo Diaz with his Brazil address, phone number, and other information. The computer was re-booted, they heard the DecTalk prompt, and then, the JAWS logo came onto the screen. After that, JAWS version 2.31, serial number 0004814 registered to Ronaldo Diaz came through the speaker followed by the c:\ prompt. Carson let Ronaldo sit at the computer keyboard, and as he typed, the keystrokes were echoed through the speaker. Also, all of the information coming to the screen was spoken to Vocha. He was elated at this miracle. He could still use his computer and be as independent as possible.

Boyd showed Diaz some fundamental JAWS commands, but since it was midnight, Carson said he needed some shut eye. Diaz agreed, and they would continue the next morning.

Boyd had a fitful nights sleep and some of the craziest dreams. He didn't remember them all, but in one, he had been driving the red rocket on a beach somewhere. The top was down, and he and Kristal were soaking up the sun. Boyd always liked dreams like that, because he was no longer blind and it felt good not to be restricted.

As Boyd remembered the dream, other thoughts raced through his mind. Boyd remembered the first day he had met Kristal. It was on July 31st, 1981, when they were introduced by one of Boyd's fraternity brothers. It was love at first sight, and it truly was, because Boyd's vision was still doing pretty well back then. Kristal had been wearing a tan jumpsuit that matched the color of her Pontiac Sunbird. They had gone out to dinner, and from that point on, they were inseparable. They were married about five months later on December 19th.

Boyd's thoughts shot ahead to all of the time he and Kristal had devoted to his Masters degree. It had taken about a year and a half to get his degree, but that was the easy part. Boyd tried for fifteen months to find employment, but many of the employers in the south didn't have confidence in his abilities to provide good work for their agencies.

Boyd also remembered the time when he and Kristal had that paper route for a month to make some extra money. It had taken awhile, but they got the sequence down pat. Kristal would say, "Now," and Boyd would throw the paper out the passenger door window. He remembered when he had been recommended for the VR counseling job with the Florida Division of Blind Services, and he and Kristal had celebrated by having a great dinner at a local

restaurant in St. Augustine. At the end of their dinner, they saw the most beautiful sunset over the marina. In all actuality, the DBS job was the catalyst for everything that had happened up to this point. Through DBS, he had gone to Starkville, Mississippi to attend the two week access technology training program, and one year later, he had applied for and gotten the technology specialist position at the Research and Training Center at Mississippi State University. He remembered he and Kristal on the train to Vienna, Austria, and they were looking out the picture window, and Kristal was describing the scenery to Boyd as it passed by the window.

Kristal had traveled a lot with Boyd, but on some training programs, she wasn't able to make the trip. On those occasions, Boyd would return to the Airport, and a flight attendant would be escorting him to the gate, and as soon as they had passed the security area, Boyd would hear those familiar footfalls, and Kristal's arms would be wrapped around his neck. Boyd would give her a big hug, a monster kiss, and say, "Let's go home, baby, it's been a hell of a ride."

That was always the best part of any trip, but back to reality. Ernie was knocking on the door, and Boyd checked his watch. It was 9:30, and he said Ronaldo would be ready to start in about a half hour. Boyd got up and went to the bathroom to take care of business and thought that this Diaz was a pushy little jerk.

Chapter 12

The mall, memories, and surprises

Kristal woke up at 9:00, and slowly but surely, she remembered the hell from the night before. She found the number for Clyde Jenkins and phoned his office.

Lisa answered the phone and said, “Agent Jenkins is out working on some leads.” She said she would have him call Kristal as soon as possible.

Kristal had some coffee, and she was too keyed up to eat any breakfast. It was 10:30, and she still hadn’t heard anything from the FBI guy. She hopped in the shower but listened very carefully for the phone.

There was still no call by 11:30, and Kristal was just about ready to climb the walls. She grabbed the cell phone and made her way to the red rocket. She was just going to drive around the city awhile, but soon, she found herself at the mall. She parked where she always parked and made her way into the guts of the mall. She walked for about a half an hour, but she wasn’t really looking at anything. She looked up at the bright lights of the mall and thought back to the adventure in Munich, Germany.

She and Boyd had stopped in Munich for a few days after the Vienna conference. When they walked into the dance club at the hotel, they could not believe how much it looked like a disco back in the 80’s. Sure enough, great songs from the disco era came over the sound system, and Kristal watched as three or four couples went to the dance floor. Kristal noticed a young Asian girl dancing with a man she was sure was at least a thousand years old, and she told Boyd about the couple. Boyd asked Kristal if she wanted to go for it, so the two of them headed for the dance floor. They did all of the moves from the old days, and when they exited the dance floor, the young Asian girl was applauding loudly.

She came over to their table, and said to Boyd and Kristal, “You dance better than any yank I ever see.”

Kristal’s thoughts shifted, and she remembered when she and Boyd watched Hawaiian dancers perform at the Hilton on Wakiki beach. Boyd had taken her there for their 13th anniversary. Her thoughts rambled on, and a smile came to her face as she remembered Boyd in Old Tucson, Arizona.

She had met him in Phoenix for a long weekend during one of Boyd’s training programs at MSU, and they had driven to Old Tucson in that rented, red convertible. Boyd was walking on the wooden sidewalks of the old western town doing his John Wayne impression. “By God, baby sister,” he said. “That’s a Colts Dragoon. You’re no bigger than a corn nubbin. What are you doing with all this pistol?”

Kristal was walking, thinking, and remembering, but off to the side, she thought she heard her name. She looked around and there was Carl. He was one of the maintenance people at their old condo on Beacon Parkway East. The two of them had become pretty good buddies, and they both talked about old times and talked about some of the people at the condo complex, and Kristal asked how were things at the complex. They were both walking by now, because Kristal was trying to burn up some energy.

Carl said he was no longer at the complex, and he was now working for a large landscape company that served a large portion of Shelby county. He does most of his work on large properties, and by the way, he was sorry he could not say hello to Mr. Carson yesterday, but he was mowing the grass.

Kristal froze in her tracks, turned to Carl, and said, “What did you say?”

Carl said he had seen Mr. Carson get out of a red convertible about 4:45 and go into a large house on 119 yesterday afternoon.

Kristal asked Carl to come with her, and they made their way to the red rocket. She made a phone call to Jenkins’s office, and Lisa routed the call to Jenkins immediately.

Chapter 13

More Technology

It was 12 noon, and Boyd and Ronaldo had been working on the JAWS command structure for about three hours. Ronaldo was a good student and was very good with the computer keyboard. He had mastered the JAWS main menu, said Carson, but Ernesto did not understand.

Boyd was really getting tired of Ernie's questions, but the trainer in him carried on. He said, "The JAWS main menu is a group of settings which allow you to change the way JAWS functions. For example, the voice settings part of the menu allows you to change the word, punctuation, and number pronunciation. You can also change the rate of speech and choose a different voice." He demonstrated by arrowing through the ten voices of the DecTalk. Ronaldo like Beautiful Betty, so they changed it permanently to that voice. Boyd said the other menu choices were too complicated, and it would take a week to do them justice. It really wouldn't take that long, but he wanted to brush off Ernie.

Ernie was fascinated at the power of JAWS, but Boyd said all speech software packages have these capabilities. The only difference between most speech software is that they have different command structures. Boyd told Ronaldo he was at a good point to use JAWS at the DOS level, but in order to use it with specific programs, some additional skills would be required. Boyd would need to know the specific program he was using, so he could plan a training sequence for that program.

Ronaldo said he only used one software program, and it was called Procomm. Boyd asked him to load the program and Ronaldo typed `cd\procomm`, pressed enter, type Procomm, pressed enter, and the familiar logo came onto the screen.

Boyd said this was the same program he had used for years on his computer at work, and he said, "Let's go eat some lunch, and we'll resume about 1:30."

Ronaldo asked if they would be ready by 2:30, because he needed to conduct some business using this program, and Boyd said no problem. While Carson and Ronaldo were working, Ernesto had picked up a large pizza with everything, because as it was, this would be Senor Carson's last meal. Once Vocha completed his business, they would eliminate Carson. Rudolfo argued to spare Carson's life, but Vocha said he had lived too long to take any chances.

Carson walked into the kitchen, took in the smells, and said, "Ernie, you're a man after my own heart. If you've got a beer, we can have a great meal."

Ernesto handed him a beer, and they sat down to chow.

Chapter 14

The Perimeter

Clyde pulled into the mall parking lot and found Kristal and the red convertible. He got the details from Carl, and they all climbed into Jenkin's car. They took 31 north to 459. They took 459 to I65 south and made their way to 119. Carl pointed out the house, and as they passed by, Clyde took in the details.

There was about a quarter mile of trees on each side of the house, and in front of the house, there was a four foot high wall with a gap in the middle for the driveway. The house was about fifty yards back, and the red convertible was parked in front of the house. Clyde thought, *These son of a bitches really know how to set up a perimeter.*

Clyde stopped about a mile east of the house and used his two way radio to make arrangements. Clyde had requested four cars from the Shelby County sheriffs department. He positioned two a half mile east and west of the house, and the other two a mile east and west of the house. This way, he could stop traffic, and even if there was a honking jerk in the bunch, the sound could not be heard from the house. A black pickup made its way east on 119, but it was not on the road. The pickup came to the first check point, and the sheriff's deputy looked at the man's ID and waved him through. At the second check point, Charlie G. got out of the truck with his rifle case and made his way to the house. About an eighth of a mile from the house, he went into the woods and parked himself at the northwest corner of the property. Charlie unpacked his rifle, checked the scope, and waited for instructions. When Jenkins made it to the northeast corner of the property, it was 2:15, and he saw Rudolfo Carta washing the red convertible. It was 2:30 when Charlie G got three clicks on the radio which signaled all stations were ready to proceed with the plan.

Chapter 15

The Showdown

It was 2:25, and Ronaldo had been working diligently to learn as much as possible about the speech program. Ronaldo was about to initiate the connection when Boyd asked if he wanted to use the headphones that were provided with the DecTalk. This way he could have some privacy during his business meeting.

Vocha had never thought of that. He thought he would have to kill Carson after hearing the passwords, but with the headphones, Vocha could have privacy, and since Carson was blind, he could not identify him or Rudolfo. He had great respect for Carson's expertise, and he was glad other blind people would be able to benefit from his services.

Boyd said he needed to make one more speech adjustment, and as he input the keystrokes, he told Ronaldo this would make the speech read more efficiently as it scrolled onto the monitor. Carson had found it to be very helpful. Carson plugged in the headphone, handed them to Ronaldo, and Ronaldo established the connection.

It was 2:30 on a bright and sunny Saturday in north Shelby County. Rudolfo Carta was finishing up the hood on the red convertible. It had gotten a little dirty since yesterday, and it didn't need washing, but this was a good way to enjoy the sun and watch the grounds at the same time. He had done well, in that it was fifty yards to the road and at least seventy yards to the woods on each side of the house. The realtor said the woods in the back go for about a mile.

Rudolfo looked around and everything seemed in order, but something was missing. He thought for a minute and then he knew what it was. There had been

no traffic for the last fifteen minutes or so, and at that moment, the voice of Clyde Jenkins came over the bull horn and told Rudolfo to lie down on the ground and spread eagle. Rudolfo slid the 45 out of his shoulder holster and shot three quick times at the direction of the voice. The slugs hit surprisingly close to Jenkins and Rudolfo bolted for the front door. Inside, he could mount a better defense. He serpentine towards the front door like he had been trained and leaped onto the front porch.

The go ahead came to Charlie G., and he sighted Carta in the crosshair. Charlie smiled as he saw Carta serpentine towards the front door of the house, and he thought, *This guy is pretty good, but I am better.* Charlie moved his sights to the front door at the approximate height of Carta and waited for him to enter the sight.

Carta made it to the front door, turned the knob, and the door started to open. Carta thought he was going to make it, but he was slammed against the door. Carta's head came into the sight, and Charlie squeezed the trigger. The shell hit Carta in the back of the head, and threw him into the front door. Carta was slammed against the front door, and as it opened, Carta followed the momentum of the door and fell in and to the left. Once Clyde saw Carta heading for the front door, he jumped over the four foot wall and ran towards the front of the house. He was about thirty feet away when he saw Carta's head explode.

Ronaldo had been on his call for about five minutes when Boyd heard the first gunshots. Ronaldo had the headphones on, so he could not hear any of the outside sounds. Boyd carefully grabbed his telescopic cane, listened for a few seconds, and swung towards the sound. If he was accurate, a level swing with the buzzing headphones would catch Ronaldo around the nose area. As soon as Carson struck, he made his way to the hallway door.

Vocha was in the middle of a conversation about the cost per kilo when his face seemed to explode. Vocha grabbed his nose. It was bleeding, but it wasn't as bad as he thought. He tore off the headphones and heard Carson moving towards the door, he pulled out his gun, and took a shot. At that moment, Carson was taking a right turn down the hallway, and the bullet hit the wall across from the room. Vocha still heard Carson moving down the hallway, so he got up and followed Carson. He was going to take care of that little shit.

As Clyde Jenkins came through the front door, he looked towards the back of the house and saw Boyd Carson coming up the hallway. He had just made it to the living room when Clyde saw another man come into the hallway. The man had a weapon, and Clyde yelled, "FBI!" and hit the ground.

Boyd didn't have to be told twice, so he hit the ground and rolled to the right. Vocha stood in the hallway, tried to locate the voice, and raised the gun. Clyde lowered to a three point stance, and they both fired at the same time. Vocha's bullet flew over Clyde's head, but Clyde's 44 slug hit Vocha in the chest. Vocha fell backwards down the hall, and the gun fell from his hand.

Jenkins raced to Vocha, checked his pulse, but he was dead. He went over to Boyd Carson and helped him to his feet. "Hello, Mr. Carson, my name is special agent Clyde Jenkins. Are you okay?"

Boyd said he was okay, but he wasn't sure what the hell was going on.

Clyde said, "You were kidnapped by Rudolfo Carta and Roberto Vocha. The young Carta was taken out earlier, and Vocha was shot by Jenkins. Both of them were major cocaine traffickers for North America."

"You mean that old, blind, son of a bitch was a cocaine lord?"

Clyde thought he had finally found the connection.

Boyd said he had been training Vocha or Diaz to use a computer with speech to conduct some of his business. "I had a feeling he was going to a lot of trouble to deal in tropical fruit futures on the computer." Carson showed Clyde the computer setup, and as Clyde looked at the computer screen, he saw the *no carrier* prompt on the screen.

"Son of a bitch," said Clyde. "If we had gotten here a little earlier, we could've possibly gotten the access passwords. We have known about Vocha's computerized cocaine network, but we could never intercept the transmissions."

A smile came to Boyd's face, and he went over to the computer. He unplugged the headphones, and he pressed Alt F1, and the file was saved onto the hard drive. Earlier, Boyd had told Diaz or Vocha he had to adjust the speech system to work more efficiently with the Procomm software package. Actually, he had hit the Alt F1 and enter and let Vocha do his business. Carson said he was always the curious sort, so he used this command to snoop on Diaz.

Clyde Jenkins didn't understand, so Boyd explained. "In Procomm, the Alt F1 followed by the enter key will save all of the information scrolling on the screen to a file on the computer's hard drive. The Alt F1 he just typed

closed and saved the file on the hard drive.” Carson exited Procomm, and the c:\procomm prompt was on the screen. Carson typed, type procomm.log and pressed enter.

Clyde could not believe his eyes. The phone number to the secret vault, the passwords, and all of the input up to the time Carson had hit Vocha came onto the screen. Boyd said to Jenkins that it was pretty ironic that he had used Vocha’s own program to wipe out his cocaine dynasty. In addition, Vocha was so cocky that he didn’t even have the passwords hidden as he typed them into the computer. A call came over Jenkins’s radio, and he said it would be okay.

At the first sound of shots, Kristal bolted from Jenkins’s car and got by the deputy at the one mile security check point. She wasn’t so fortunate at the half mile check point. The deputy cornered her, but she wasn’t going to give up without a fight. She told the deputy that if he wanted to have children, he better reconsider his current action. There was a tone in her voice that said she meant business, so he stayed a few feet back.

There had been no gunshots for about ten minutes, and Kristal asked the deputy to radio Jenkins to give her permission to come to the house.

As Clyde and Boyd walked onto the porch, Clyde said he would debrief him tomorrow, and Boyd said that was a winner. Boyd stepped onto the gravel driveway and heard a familiar sound. There were those familiar footfalls, and soon, the two arms of Kristal were around Boyd’s neck. As Kristal hugged him speechlessly, Boyd said, “Hey, baby. Let’s go home. It’s been a hell of a ride!”

The end of this adventure!